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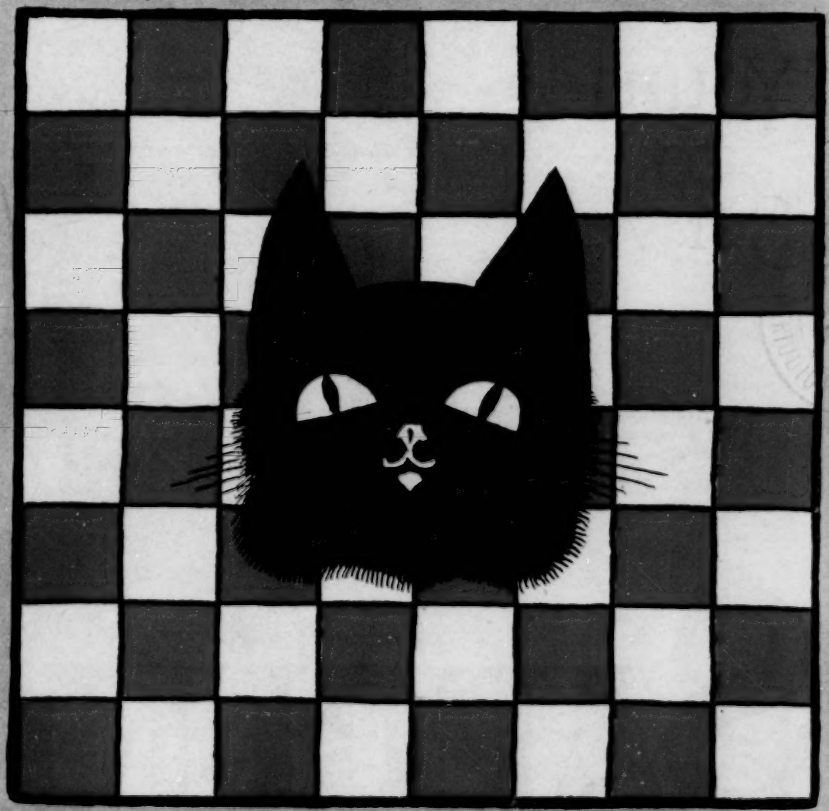
The Black Cat



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Ten Cents

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The Black Cat

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Primal Forces.*

BY MORISON GRAY.

NO one had noticed when the fellow came in. The swing doors made no noise ; and the chorus from the round table would have drowned it anyway. Bowman and I, sitting near the window, chanced to see him first, as we faced the fireplace where he stood with his back to the blaze. We both found ourselves looking at him with something more than mere interest or surprise.

It was unusual for any one not a student or a " grad " to venture into Larry's when the big loving-cup was to the fore, as it always was on Wednesday night ; still, that fact alone would not have aroused extraordinary attention. But there was something about the man which puzzled us. He had the general appearance of a wayfarer or a tramp. His clothes were poor, the collar of his old coat turned up about his throat ; his shoes were broken ; and yet there was an elusive quality in his makeup that somehow bespoke superiority to these conditions, if not indifference to them. It might have been the carriage of his shoulders, which had nothing of the slouch of the professional " beat " ; it might have been the fact of his being clean shaven, though neither of these things by itself was enough to account for the impression his appearance

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created of something beyond the mere out-of-a-job or hard luck case. I think it must have been the manner in which he looked about the room that fixed my attention first.

Larry's was unique. It was not the ordinary café, with sporting prints about the walls, and rows of steins hanging conventionally from the shelves. The pictures were all of 'varsity teams and captains ; a trophy of boating flags hung above the mantel ; and fixed against the wall high up on the long side of the room, was a section of a racing barge belonging to a period of college aquatics before the day of shells.

The stranger standing at the fireplace was looking about him, not with the curiosity of one who views things for the first time, but as a man does when he renews old memories of familiar objects. His gaze went from point to point among the trophies and photographs with the assurance of one who *knows ;* and when he wheeled about and looked behind him at the flags over the mantel, it was but a single glance, as when one wishes to assure himself that a thing is where it used to be.

Bowman kicked me gently under the table. " College man," he muttered ; " get him over here and find out who he is."

Catching the other's eye, he motioned to a chair at our table ; and with a nod the stranger came and took it. " Have something ? " Bowman asked. The reply startled us both. " One of those golden bucks, and a toby." Golden bucks were Larry's specialty ; and no one would have ordered in that confident tone unless he had known it.

While we waited, the new-comer accepted an Egyptian Beauty, and became lost in a reverie from which neither of us ventured to rouse him. Under cover of the smoke, however, I was watching him, as he sat with his eyes fixed upon the brown table. It gave me a creepy feeling. Somewhere in Heine there is a passage where he likens a woman's face to a palimpsest, — you know, — an old parchment used twice, — on which there is a quotation from some religious author, while underneath you can still faintly trace the words of a heathen love-song which the monkish copyist has vainly tried to erase. This fellow's face was a palimpsest. There were different things written on it. They were so mingled that it puzzled you to guess which had been written first, the good or the

evil. Both were there now, anyway ; and as the stranger suddenly raised his eyes, the effect was intensified. It was one of Poe's characters come to life, and sitting there in Larry's cheerful room, — a note of tragedy amid all that youth and exuberance, — with the college trophies and the college songs, so out of keeping with what his somber personality suggested. Unaccountably it irritated me ; and Bowman must have had the same feeling, for all of a sudden he spoke up, and said, " For Heaven's sake, man, have you lost your tongue ? "

It wasn't a polite thing ; but the other didn't appear to mind it. He looked past us to where the loving-cup was passing from hand to hand at the round table with all the solemnity which invests the convivial functions of the undergraduate. His gaze followed it as it went the rounds. What was in that look of his ? Was it curiosity ? Was it regret ? No one could have guessed. His eyes were absolutely devoid of expression. They were as hard and bright and meaningless as agates.

Finally he pulled himself together and spoke ; and his voice was as expressionless as his eyes ; it was devoid of tone, or timbre, or whatever you call it. It was simply an *utterance*. It was without personality in it, — level and flat and dead as that of an automaton ; and yet it thrilled you, unaccountably, disagreeably. You felt as though the speaker's experiences had taken him beyond the point where anything could ever *move* him again ; he simply *accepted* things : that was all.

" You see what I was once." He opened his shabby coat, — and on a slender chain running across his chest there hung a little gold cross. " Fifteen years ago, I was in orders, in a country parish. There was little to do outside the routine of services and what few calls I chose to make upon my scattered parishioners. I lived alone, and put in most of my time reading for a Ph. D. in mental and moral science. Naturally of a morbid temperament, my psychological reading made me more so. Evening after evening I would sit before my fire and let my mind simply drift and wander among the unlimited possibilities of the unknown. I devoured all the strange romances of Dumas and Poe and Bulwer-Lytton which deal with the occult. This was my specialty, my hobby ; it became at last my world. I began to think of myself

no longer as a man with work to do, but as a problem for investigation, a subject for experiment, a field for the operation of invisible forces. That accepted fact of personality with which all human knowledge begins : how account for it ? How explain it ? Of what is it the result ? What holds it in its groove ? How much would it take to uproot and overturn a character rooted in sound moral traditions and buttressed by sound moral habits ? I wondered how it might be in my case. I used in my solitary walks to pass an old house which had stood vacant for years on account of a tragedy which had occurred there. No one would live in it ; and yet, you never would have guessed from its appearance that it had a bad name. By rights, it should have borne a tragic *look,* — mouldering, neglected, with weeds growing high in the dooryard, and windows hastily boarded up. Instead, it was as trim and respectable a little place as you could imagine ; — clean white paint and green blinds, nice little close-cut lawn, with a gravel drive bordered with whitewashed stones. It always gave me this thought ; it had only taken a moment to set the curse upon that house, — the angry word answered by the angry blow ? How long would it take to set the curse upon a *man,* — myself, for instance, — given the opportunity. Would the beast, the primal instincts, dominate the will, the inherited traditions and habits of self-control under which I had always lived ? I recalled the famous passage in Plato, where the spectator in Hades asks why some of those who enter there are sinners, while some are righteous ; and the answer is given that it has been simply a question of opportunity. I wondered, as I say, how it would be with *me ;* how great a degree of moral strain could I endure without a catastrophe ; was opportunity all that was lacking to make of me a villain ?

" You have no idea of how I was possessed by that thought. It was always with me. A touch might upset my moral equilibrium ; the introduction of some element hitherto unknown might precipitate a catastrophe; and whereas I looked at this first as a possibility only, I began now to regard it as a certainty ; and found myself awaiting the moment not merely with curiosity, but even with eagerness. Will the chance come today? Will I tomorrow be like that house on the side road, — smug and trim and

respectable without, but with the stain of a nameless deed within ? I won't dwell on the details; enough to say that the chance offered; and that the beast won."

Bowman and I, at our table, had been listening with a strained intentness. It was not until the speaker stopped that we realized how still the room was. The fellows at the round table had ceased passing the loving-cup, and were listening too. Little groups of men from other parts of the room had crept close, and were looking over one another's shoulders with various grotesque expressions of unconscious absorption.

Our man never noticed. After a moment he went on, — always in that passionless voice that made you creep.

"A year later I was in Chicago, living on a little fund I had laid by out of my stipend. That year had been a dream. By some psychological paradox, my personality was divided, not into two, Jekyll and Hyde, — but into three, — the third standing one side, an absolute spectator, and watching the contest, where primal instincts and forces battled against acquired habits and training for the mastery of the soul. It was the strangest thing — and fascinating beyond belief. I *lived* for that problem, — to see whether in the end beast or man would win ; and yet my interest was purely speculative and impersonal. I had no desire for this or that outcome ; I simply watched to see.

"My money was gone after awhile ; and then for the first time I began to realize my true position. I was forced to think of myself not merely as a problem, but as a man who had sinned ; and when I did, life became insupportable. What had become of the girl, I did not know, — I never knew ; but I *did* know that by every consideration of conscience and of reason, as it seemed to me, I ought to put myself out of the way. The test had been made, and the physical had shown itself master. Should I allow myself to continue in life at the risk of repetitions, of even a single repetition, of such a thing as I had done ? Opportunity had revealed me as a villain ; should further opportunity be permitted to emphasize that revelation ? I determined not.

"And now comes the strangest part of the story. My mind was firmly made up to dispose of myself ; but even here the fascination of the old problem re-asserted itself. I would carry

the test between the man and the animal into the very question of suicide ; I would take no deliberate step to kill myself ; but should I be in danger, — as in my precarious mode of life I might be at any time, — I would make no effort to escape. I would be the passive spectator, and let the other two fight it out. I do not think I ever questioned the result. The *will to die* would of course be the stronger. There were absolutely no ties binding me to life. My career was ruined, my character gone, — I had no money, no prospects, no place of repentance ; nothing could undo that into which opportunity had betrayed me. I was confident that when the danger came, I would welcome it with open arms ; and I was eager for the day of my release.

" You fellows would not credit the shifts to which I was forced in those days for mere existence, — the lowest and most degrading. I was stevedore on the docks, helper in stables, common laborer on the streets. I was exposed to countless risks, — and yet for awhile there was nothing serious enough to meet my need. Exposure and exhaustion, bad food, stimulants, — they ought by rights to have wrecked me : instead they toughened me. I began to regard myself as reserved for the one supreme occasion, the great moment when would come a spectacular test between instinct and conscience ; when *the will to die* would win. The moment came at last ; it was not, however, spectacular ; it was sordid, miserable, hideous. I was working for a contractor who was dredging the harbor. Two shifts were on ; I was one of the night men. Trimming the load on a scow during a pouring rain, my foot slipped, and I went over into the icy water. In a flash the thought came, — ' This settles it — the end at last ! ' But to my horror I found myself struggling desperately, piteously, for life. The primal instinct of self-preservation surged up with a mighty rush and overwhelmed everything else ; I clung in spite of myself to that existence from which I so longed to be free ; and at last, stretched in safety upon the foul mud of the dredger, I wept bitter tears of humiliation and despair.

" From this time on life became a thing of horror. The forces upon which I had relied had failed me ; that which I had counted out had proved the stronger. The primal instinct, the animal, had ruined life for me ; the same enemy forbade me now to part

with that ruined life. I knew how Dr. Jekyll felt, when, through an unsuspected impurity, the drug which had transformed him into Hyde lost its power to release him.

"And yet there always remained a shred of hope. The next opportunity would do what the first had not. Surely that Pity which broods over the woes of mankind would at length side with that which was best in me, and fight against the beast to his downfall. There *must* be a loosening of that fatal and hideous contradiction by which moral decay, instead of destroying, served to maintain a hated existence. I never once thought of the hereafter; my soul was concentrated upon the one absorbing idea, — to end the present horror.

"And so hope lived ; but hope deceived me continually. Time and again I was in peril ; time and again at the supreme moment came surging up that resistless instinct for self-preservation, snatching me now from in front of a cable-car, now from under a falling wall, — a dozen times from danger of various kinds; and for what ? Often have I recalled that old-time picture of an angry God, holding sinners over the pit and delaying to plunge them in, that he might enjoy their agony ! "

The speaker paused, and his eyes went around the breathless circle.

"I have no business to put such thoughts into the heads of you lads. I don't know why I have told you this. Least of all do I know what has brought me back to this town, and into Larry's. I have given up assigning anything to reason or volition. Primal forces, — uncomprehended, despised, — they are supreme nevertheless. But why should they bring me *here ?* It's the crowning touch of misery, — the last straw. To see you lads, with your clean hearts, and your lives before you, unspoiled — ."

His voice failed him. He suddenly arose, buttoned his old coat about him, and turned to go. The fellows made way for him without a word. The baize doors swung silently to behind him ; and his footsteps died away down the street.

For a long moment nobody stirred. Then someone drew a long breath of relief ; a chair scraped on the floor ; Larry entered briskly with some belated orders ; and the tension gave way. The talk began again ; a cheerful snapping of matches spoke of

pipes relighted ; and the room resumed its customary air.

Bowman and I walked back to our rooms late through the deserted campus. The moon was high, and the air cold and still. The clock on the City Hall tolled out its long deliberate stroke of twelve. The chapel chimes struck in with their cheerful note. Suddenly another bell sounded down town, — the heavy jarring boom of the fire department's signal. In a moment the campus was alive. Windows were thrown open, voices called, feet thundered on the stairways, and the moonlit yard was alive with scampering figures streaming toward the gateways. A reddish glare to the eastward showed the direction of the fire, already apparently under great headway ; and Bowman and I joined in the rush toward the scene.

Fire lines were already established when we arrived, and two engines were hard at work. It was a difficult proposition for the firemen. The blaze had started in the third story of a warehouse, which was sheathed in iron, and fitted at the side and rear windows with iron shutters which defied the axe-men. In front, for some reason, the windows were unprotected ; and here the intense heat had shattered the glass panes, and the smoke was pouring out in clouds, while now and then a long tongue of flame shot curling upward. One of the engines had a stream playing upon the neighboring buildings, and the other was pouring water into the warehouse windows, two helmeted firemen holding the nozzle. Suddenly, on an order through the chief's megaphone, this stream ceased; a ladder was rushed to the front and reared above the heads of the crowd, falling against the building at a wide angle. Another order, and the two hosemen climbed together like monkeys up the wide rungs, and directed their nozzle toward the window where the glare was brightest. But for some unexplained reason the stream failed to come. The men turned their heads anxiously around, then back again to their hose, and worked furiously at the nozzle ; but something was jambed, and no water followed. Breathlessly the crowd watched them. Somewhere the bark of a dog was audible, muffled, insistent, as though in some distant barn or shed, where he was tied up and excited by the noise. The chief was roaring through his megaphone, the firemen busy in a profane frenzy about their useless hose.

Upstreet we suddenly heard a clang, clang, swelling louder and louder, and amid a warning shout from the crowd a hook and ladder truck, drawn by a pair of powerful grays, swung around the corner, the tillerman working like a fiend at his wheel, and thundered down toward the burning building. The pavement was not of cobbles, as in most factory districts ; but of ancient flagstones, worn smooth by constant friction of hoofs and wheels. The nigh horse slipped and went on his knees, — heaved himself up by a gigantic effort, — slipped again, and crashed prostrate, dragging his mate with him ; and the great machine, with its half ton of ladders, rolled on and over them, entangling them, thrashing hoofs and jangling harness, in a complete and hopeless wreck.

For once the chief lost his head. He ran distractedly toward the ruin of his apparatus, leaving his engines to look out for themselves. The crew of the ladder truck were straining at the wheels, in a vain effort to drag the machine from the terrified horses ; but the street was steep, and they made no progress. One stream of water still played powerfully, now on the burning warehouse, now on the adjacent roofs ; but the blaze was gaining fast, as the gleam from the windows of the upper floors plainly showed. The fire was working its way through. The barking of the unseen dog became louder, more insistent still ; there was a sudden crash of shivering glass, and the animal appeared at a window of the top story, his paws planted on the sill, a fragment of rope dangling from his collar, and sent out his appeal for help in a note of agony which was almost human. No one heeded. The single ladder already in commission was too short ; the others were in confusion on the helpless truck. The dog disappeared, then came into view again, weaving ceaselessly back and forth within the narrow limits of his window, his throat torn with barking.

Bowman suddenly grasped my arm. "On the roof !" he shouted in my ear. A black figure was visible on the skyline, bending over the projecting cornice, and peering downward. The man wore no helmet, and it was impossible to tell whether he was a fireman. All at once he stood up, pulled off his coat and threw it from him, sat astride of the cornice with one leg hanging over ; then, grasping the coping with both hands, lowered his body to the full

length of his arms, and began to feel with his toes for a foothold. It was a perilous thing to do. Hanging from the wide cornice, he swung out from the façade of the building. Unless he could reach a blind, or a window-cap, on which to rest his weight, he must either draw himself up again by main strength, no ordinary feat for untrained muscles ; or else fall to the street and be dashed to pieces upon the flags. Even should he succeed in finding a temporary foothold, how could that help him ? He dared not for even a second loosen his grip on the cornice. The dog at the window had seen him. He understood that his rescue was being attempted ; and instead of barking, began to whine with a piercing entreaty. The dangling figure was just above him, its feet seeking blindly along the wall.

Casting a look around, I saw on every side of me faces white and strained, their eyes riveted upon the impending tragedy. Behind us a cheer went up. The firemen, hooking both engine teams to the rear of their ladder truck, had at last succeeded in dragging it from the helpless grays. Turning back to the warehouse, I was horrified at what I saw. The man on the top of the building was now hanging by one hand from the cornice, as though exhausted by his efforts ; his body hung limp and apparently nerveless. Shuddering, I closed my eyes ; and when after what seemed an eternity of suspense I opened them once more, I beheld a marvel. The man had let go his hold with one hand that he might reach an inch further with his toes. He was now just able to rest them on the top of the shutters of the window where the whimpering dog was in waiting, the glow of the fire increasingly bright behind him. It was scarcely a foothold that he gained in this way ; but with incredible agility and daring, he let go his hold upon the cornice, at the same moment doubling his body like lightning, and bringing feet and hands together for a single second. It was only for a second ; but as his toes slipped from their precarious resting-place, his hands seized it ; and he hung at full length again over the street, but suspended this time within easy reach of the broad sill.

A roar went up from the crowd. A warning yell followed it, and the firemen dashed through with the life-net, extricated at last from the disabled truck. Ready hands seized it on every side ; and it spread its meshes wide and safe for the man and the dog,

now together at the window, from which the black smoke was pouring in clouds. The man, his hand on the dog's collar, leaned over and seemed to hesitate. A hundred voices shouted encouragement. At last he straightened, steadied himself with one hand against the window-casing, dragged from the room the struggling dog, and heaved him down in safety into the waiting net. A pause ensued, as we waited for the rescuer to follow ; but he waited, looking out over the crowd. Behind him in the interior of the building the fire roared like a furnace ; the engines had long since directed all their efforts to saving the neighboring buildings. The flames from the lower tiers of windows licked hungrily up, and illuminated the black figure standing on the ledge ; and with a thrill Bowman and I recognized our unknown guest at Larry's. The same thought flashed through both our minds, as we glanced into each other's eyes. Why did not the man jump at once into the life-net ? He had no time to spare ; at any moment the building might roar down into flaming ruin. *He was studying his problem.* Even on the brink of that awful death, he was watching, watching, — to see which would prove the stronger, — the *will to die,* — or the primal instinct of self-preservation.

The crowd was breathless, hypnotized ; the firemen shouted advice and warning ; our man seemed not to hear. He looked out over the scene, far away into the distance. All at once the warehouse, riddled through and through by the flames, held together up to now as by a miracle by its outer iron shell, crumpled together inwards like flimsy cardboard ; and sank instantly to a heap of fiery rubbish. The dark form at the upper window, with time for but a single great cry, was swallowed up in the very heart of the glowing mass.

Under the spell of the tragedy we walked back in silence to the campus. At the gate we faced each other with solemn eyes.

" That cry ! " said Bowman ; " I shall never forget it — the horror of it ! " He shuddered. " It was the supreme utterance of despair ! " But I turned away without a word ; for the cry had rung in my ears like a shout of triumph, at the final solution of the problem of an agonized soul.

The Smile of Krishna.*

BY JAMES FRANCIS DWYER.

N one matter the Imperial British Government prides itself. It pays strict attention to detail, and in its method of doing things it adopts the watchword "Thorough." If a Fuzzy Wuzzy gets sportive in the Soudan, or an Afghan skips merrily down from the Hoorshee Hills to harry the border in his contempt for the *Sahibs,* the Imperial British Government goes about the work of subjugation with a ponderous majesty that impresses the world. Other nations may do things with a hop, skip and a jump backed up by a college yell, but such proceedings are not favored in Downing Street. There, where the threads of the Empire are drawn together, matters are given weighty consideration, and if the Afghan or the Burman has a good time while the I. B. G. is considering his outbreak, one thing is certain that when it does move, the colored person finds that the game is not so interesting as he imagined. Of course, there have been exceptions.

This is the story of a gift. When the Maharajah Gholeep Singh, who was under the patronage of the Imperial Government, applied for an English tutor, he heard of many things of which he had been in utter ignorance. The tutor was an Oxford man whose father was thirteenth lord-in-waiting, and the virtues of Queen Victoria were dangled in front of the Maharajah's eyes till he felt that he should send her some token of appreciation. Being under the patronage of the I. B. G. his revenues were handled by a Resident who was rather niggardly with the rupee bag, so Gholeep Singh levied on the treasure of his forefathers and selected "The Smile of Krishna."

"The Smile of Krishna" was a deep red diamond that rivaled the beautiful stone of a similar tint that was purchased for the Russian crown by the Emperor Paul. Tradition said that it was

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originally owned by the Caliph Omar, the successor of Mohammed, the first to bear the title of "Prince of the Faithful," and that it was stolen from his head-dress by the slave that stabbed him. It was brought to India by Tamerlane the Magnificent when he sacked Delhi in the twelfth century, and by a chain of murders, thefts, and accidental deaths it had come into the possession of Gholeep Singh, who possessed a large harem and a small mind, and who wished to give proof of the latter by presenting the beautiful stone to the nation under whose rule he writhed.

The Resident forwarded the wish of the Maharajah to the Governor General of India, and the Governor General added a few comments and forwarded the papers to Downing Street. Downing Street at that moment was dealing out Maxim bullets so hurriedly to an insurgent in the Soudan that the chief's supporters were seriously damaged in trying to stop them, and the matter of "The Smile of Krishna" was shelved for the time being. Peace being restored at the end of three months, it took the matter up again, and turned it over seven hundred and fifty times without coming to a decision. Downing Street was living up to its reputation. It called in wise men skilled in the traditions of India to make certain that the acceptance of the jewel would not antagonize the Maharajah's subjects, and finally, seven months after Gholeep Singh had made the offer, the Governor General of India was informed that Her Majesty would accept the gift, and that the Cabinet would turn its official mind to the matter of conveying the priceless gem from Calcutta to London.

The average American senator would suggest putting such a job in the hands of an express company, but the British Cabinet minister takes no chances. "The Smile of Krishna" was something too valuable to trust to strangers, so three officers of Her Majesty's household were ordered to go out to India, accept the gift from the Maharajah's agents at Calcutta and bring it safely home to dear old London.

The three chosen had genealogical trees whose roots ran back to the time when the Druids worshipped at Stonehenge. They were the Honorable Captain Percy Newcome Fitzhardinge, Major Eustis Marriott Fane de Salais, and the Honorable Ferdinand Elmsley Deschard. Their instructions were typewritten and covered

twenty-seven sheets of official paper. They were forbidden to mix with other passengers either going out to India or coming home. They were not to speak of their mission to any other traveler. They were not to gamble or drink (their past records proved that they had not committed either offence up to that moment), and they were to divide their watch in such a way that one of their number, awake and armed, would always have the priceless jewel under his eye. When the Peninsula and Oriental steamer *Himalaya* swung down the Thames, the three considered themselves the most important personages in the whole British Empire, and they built a wall of reserve around themselves that didn't weaken a trifle till the musky smell of Calcutta rushed down the Hoogly to greet their aristocratic noses.

Her Majesty's Messengers didn't leave the ship. The *Himalaya* was returning almost immediately, and as Calcutta offers temptations for the untraveled, the allwise gray-heads in Downing Street were taking no chances. The trio viewed the city from the docks, and anxiously awaited the arrival of the Maharajah's servants who were to deliver the jewel on the day before sailing.

It was on the morning of that day that the three sat upon the poop deck of the *Himalaya,* and choking with the sense of their coming responsibility, glanced suspiciously at the other Anglo-Indians who were to be fellow passengers on the return journey. There were many important persons aboard. A red-faced baronet, gouty and bad tempered, walked round on the arm of a valet who owned a Northumbrian burr that seemed out of place on the Hoogly. The younger son of a lord was hurrying home from a hunting trip, recalled by the news that his father and eldest brother were stricken with fever, while all around were gold-laced sections of the great Fist of India, the military, which keeps the ryot's nose to the grindstone so that the little island in the North Sea can get a good share of his earnings.

The three guardians of "The Smile of Krishna" held themselves aloof with a strict adherence to the typewritten rules. They looked neither to the right nor the left. They asked no questions and remained silent when they were asked any. They refused to smile when they were smiled at, and when a general's daughter dropped her handkerchief they looked the other way

and allowed a little suntanned person in a white drill suit and a pith hemlet to return the square of cambric. Not that the little man was looking for the job. He allowed the three every opportunity to perform the service, and seemed little pleased when their refusal actually forced him to the task.

A Hindu snake charmer dodged the steward at the gangway and climbed on to the poop, carrying his little basket with his crawling pets. For a moment he surveyed the passengers, then the rosy complexion of the three Englishmen attracted him, and he squat down before them. Your lean-faced sallow Anglo-Indian is not interested in serpent charming, and the person who makes a living out of crawling cobras is keenly alert to the presence of the Man from Home.

The silent trinity stared stupidly at the figure before them, and glanced at each other as if trying to recall a typewritten regulation that covered such a happening. The little basket raised suspicion in their breasts, and finally the Honorable Ferdinand Elmsley Deschard voiced his objections.

"My good fellow, will you please go away?" he lisped.

The Hindu smiled as he undid the fastenings of the basket. He had shrewd suspicions that the speaker was ignorant of his powers over the serpent tribe, and he hurried with the work of unpacking.

"Really," murmured the Honorable Ferdinand, "we do not wish to buy anything of you, my good man. Will you kindly go to the other side of the ship?"

The Hindu bowed his head till his forehead touched the deck, then with a mysterious movement of his hands he opened the lid of the basket, and a royal cobra raised its head a foot into the air and turned its evil eyes upon the three passengers.

The Honorable Captain Percy Newcome Fitzhardinge happened to be the middle man of the trio, and it was rather lucky for him that he was. With a yell of terror he fell backward from the camp stool upon which he was sitting, and it was only the efforts of his two companions that saved him from sliding down an open skylight into the dining-room below. As it was he lay in a sort of swoon, his limbs stiff and rigid, his features convulsed, and his breathing labored.

The little man wearing the pith helmet was the first to act. With a dexterous kick he lifted the basket containing the cobra over the railing into the river, and then pushing aside the Honorable Deschard and Major Fane de Salais, he pulled out a flask and forced a few drops of brandy into Fitzhardinge's mouth.

"Hunt that nigger away," he cried. "This man has snake fright, and if he sees the nigger it will send him off again."

A steward gripped the angry serpent charmer and flung him down the stairs, and while the little group waited for the patient to open his eyes, the man in the pith helmet discoursed learnedly upon the effect which the sight of a snake has upon persons of nervous temperament.

"Throws them into a sort of cataleptic condition," he said. "This man is new to snakes, got a horrow of them from birth most likely, and that damn nigger sprang that one on him all of a sudden."

He was so attentive and kind that the Honorable Ferdinand Deschard could not refuse his offer to help the sick man down to his cabin when Fitzhardinge was partially recovered, and there the little man pulled out his card case and made exchanges with the three.

"I'm a globetrotter," he laughed. "Yes, I'm one of the Surrey Langfords. Once in five years I call in at the Savage just to see that London hasn't slipped into the German Ocean, but the rest of the time I'm anywhere between Bencoolen and the Marquesas."

The three (Fitzhardinge had now quite recovered) preserved a cool front, but the little man was a hard person to evict. He read their names on the baggage, and then noted that his cabin adjoined the one occupied by two of the guardians while Deschard's was next to theirs. He expressed his pleasure at this discovery and when at last he left the cabin he assured the trio that he would see more of them during the voyage.

That afternoon the confidential agents of Gholeep Singh brought aboard the marvelous "Smile of Krishna," and next morning the *Himalaya* was hurrying towards Colombo, and the three guardians of the treasure were keyed up to the highest tension. The jewel was kept in the cabin occupied by Fitzhardinge and Fane de Salais, and here night and day one of the party watched

over it with a drawn revolver. When a servant was in the cabin, the typed regulations called for the presence of two of the guards, and when relieving each other for meals the wise men of Downing Street had ordered that the man on guard should be locked in the cabin till his two comrades returned.

The instructions were carried out to the smallest particular, and as the days followed each other without incident, the strain of the first few hours was somewhat relaxed. Colombo became a memory, Aden was left behind in a golden sunset, and the *Himalaya* ripped up the Red Sea as if anxious to hasten the delivery of the priceless jewel to Her Imperial Majesty the Empress of India.

Suez was left behind one bright June morning, and two hours afterwards the Honorable Ferdinand Deschard sat with Fitzhardinge while the Lascar servant tidied up the cabin. It was Fitzhardinge's turn on duty while the other two breakfasted, but in compliance with the rules, two of the guardians were forced to watch while a servant cleaned the stateroom. At last the Lascar finished his work, and then Deschard arose and followed him out of the door, locking it on the outside as he walked away.

Fitzhardinge sat on the bed with his revolver on his knees, and behind the thoughts of the jewel rose memories of a fair haired girl who had bade him good-bye at Tilbury some weeks before. He had not informed her then of the duty which was taking him to the East, and a thrill passed through him as he pictured her face when he explained that he had been specially chosen to guard "The Smile of Krishna" on its journey to England.

"By Jove, it will please Kitty," he drawled. "That brother of hers thinks that we fellows do nothing but pull our moustaches all day long."

He made a calculation in his mind. The *Himalaya* was steaming slowly through the Suez Canal, in a few hours she would be at Port Said, and then they would say good-by to the East. Fitzhardinge detested the East. The memory of the incident on the poop deck while the vessel lay at Calcutta had not been erased from his mind, and he shivered slightly as he thought of the evil eyes of the cobra as it reared its head out of the basket.

"I won't tell that to Kitty," he murmured. "Deschard and the Major will keep quiet about it. If I told —" He stopped

speaking and stared with wide eyes at a small round dish that the Lascar had left on the floor. He remembered then that he had noticed it a few minutes before, and had wondered why the servant had not removed it when he left the cabin. The dish was of tin, and was turned upside down and placed near the wash-stand, but now it moved slowly out into the center of the room !

Fitzhardinge rubbed his eyes and watched it with choking breath. It was surely moving ! He thought of firing his revolver as a signal to his comrades, but the memory of the other incident deterred him.

" A mouse has got under it," he stammered. " That's what it is, I'll wager ! "

He put out his foot towards the moving tin, and catching the welt of his shoe in the edge of the dish he lifted it quickly. The head of a cobra immediately sprang into the air, and Fitzhardinge fell back in his berth motionless !

Thirty minutes afterwards Deschard and Fane de Salais returned from their breakfast, and the sight that met their eyes when they entered the cabin choked back the cry of alarm that struggled in their throats. Fitzhardinge still lay upon the bed, while on the floor a disabled cobra swayed its head backwards and forwards. But Fitzhardinge or the cobra received only a passing glance. A panel between the stateroom and that occupied by the little man who had stated that he was a relative of the Surrey Langfords, had been removed, and in two seconds the horror-stricken guardians had assured themselves that " The Smile of Krishna " had been stolen from the cabin.

It took ten minutes to make the captain understand the nature of the loss, and then he rubbed his head and looked back over the ruby red water.

" The Hindu was in with him," he said slowly. " Let's see. It happened about eight thirty. We were just making up towards Lake Timsah, and I guess we were as close to the shore then as we've been. It was a five minutes' swim for the two of them, and everybody bein' at breakfast there wasn't much chance of them being seen."

" But, captain," cried the excited Deschard, " we must catch

them, really ! It was for Her Majesty, the Queen, you know, and it's the devil — "

" It just is," interrupted the salt, " but the first officer tells me now that he saw two Arabs with four Bisharin camels on the bank about an hour ago, and they were following us along. If that fellow planned the first part of it so well, he didn't forget to have some means of getting across the desert. I fancy this diamond of yours is gone for keeps, and I think all your telegraphing and hunting won't bring it back again. By the way, how do I know it's for the Queen ? This is the first I've heard of that tale, and besides the rules of the ship say that all valuables should be left in the charge of the purser."

He turned on his heel and walked away, leaving the Honorable Ferdinand Elmsley Deschard in tears. But the captain's prophecy proved a true one. Nothing has since been heard of the little man in the white drill suit and the pith helmet, and the magnificent " Smile of Krishna " is but a memory.

But the cobra that was found in the cabin can still be seen. The three guardians of " The Smile " had him preserved in spirits, and now in a back room of Downing Street he occupies a position on a bureau, a silent witness of a failure that was brought about by too much caution on the part of the graybeards who run the Empire upon which the sun never sets.

Cuma.*

BY ROSE HENDERSON.

ELOW were the gray depths that lay slumbering and mysterious beyond the cliff's ragged edge. Above was the clear, calm, interminable blue. Cuma Ventura crouched in the warm sand, leaning her head against the rough rock at her side. Behind her were thick short cactus bushes growing in scattered clumps and back of these the sides of the mountain rose, steep, jagged, and barren. The rock was warm against her cheek though the sun was an hour below the Gaudaloupe peaks and the cactus shadows were growing darker on the long slopes. The air seemed heavy with silence. No bird sang. A vinegerone slipped under a stone at the edge of the cliff.

The girl sat quietly, her head bowed. The heavy, dark braids were bound with bands of glittering beads. Away in the distance sounded the faint tinkle of sheep-bells and the dull barking of a dog. At these sounds the girl raised her head. She snatched from her neck a small round locket, stared at the trinket a moment as it lay in her hand, and then flung it over the cliff into the chasm below. Her slim brown face was flushed ; her eyes were large with pain but there were no tears in them.

"So it meant not anything to him — not anything," she muttered. The truth was slowly becoming real to her and it came with the weight of death itself. It was hard to believe after the beautiful dreams, so hard. There would be nothing more to be happy about. She would have to marry Petro as her father wished. Duro, her pony, and the new saddle would be his. He would beat the little Duro when he was drunk, and her, too, he would beat her of course when he was jealous and angry.

At the thought of the ugly Mexican suitor her face broke into quick angry frowns. She pulled her long braids over her shoul-

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ders. Pierre had patted them once as she rode beside him and she had blushed foolishly. She hated herself for those blushes. And when his hand had chanced to touch hers on the saddle-horn, or when he had leaned over her, helping her to read the English books, she had trembled with a new and delicious joy.

She had taught him to know the desert and the mountains. He was often reckless in his ignorance. Once with her lips she had drawn the blood from a rattlesnake bite on his arm and Pierre had called her a brave little nurse. They had ridden for hours, for days together under the open sky. Often they had sat here among the rocks before the cliff. He had called it "the edge of the world." Once when she stood very near the perilous brink, he had caught her back suddenly, tenderly, and her head had rested for a moment on his shoulder. Together they had felt the twilight come. She had listened to his talk of his own people, of the cold winters, the snow, the sleighing, and the strange noisy cities. She had listened with her heart beating fast, her eyes upon his face and her ears filled with the music of his voice. They had seen the stars come into the deep dark sky and had watched the blue and purple shadows that cling along the "edge of the world" after sunset. Once a mountain-lion had crept upon them and Pierre had shot the creature with her gun. He was careless about weapons himself, and often went unarmed even after nightfall.

Then he had gone away. His letter came explaining his hasty leaving. He would come back soon. How she wept over the letter and the desolate loneliness that came with his absence. But he would come back, and she waited. She had borne her father's drunken scolding and Petro's hateful presence, and she had been happy through it all. Now the thought of her happiness was more bitter than the memory of her misery. He had come back and it meant nothing to him. He had played with her and then cast her aside, as she would gather a yellow poppy in the mountains and throw it away, thirsty and helpless, on the hot sand. The girl's breast heaved, her eyes glowed, little points of light scintillating in their still depths. She knitted her low dark brows and pulled the small silver-handled knife from her belt.

"He shall not go back," she said, softly. Her fingers stole

along the sharp blade, testing its keen edge, and her lips parted in a cunning smile. It was the kind of smile that flashed across old Diego's heavy lips when he was not drunk enough to be stupid and not sober enough to be lazy. Cuma had hated her father for that smile. Once he had stabbed a half-breed cow-puncher because the man refused to trade ponies with him, and Cuma watched the wretch reel from his saddle, cursing. She had forgotten the ugly horror of it now and remembered only the quick, soft thrust of the knife.

"He shall not go," she repeated.

She sprang to her feet with a swift, easy grace. She was strong and supple and closely knit. Her slender, rounded figure was as full of life as an antelope's. It was this abounding vigor that had attracted the man she had grown to love. It had held him in spite of the difference in their breeding. Sometimes its grip was stronger than the call of generations of civilization and environment. She was so simply and so wholly a woman. And her mind was ready and eager to follow his. Sometimes he had wondered if she might not learn his way of life, but that was only when he had grown delirious with the sense of her. When he weighed the matter in soberer moments he knew that this was impossible, that it would mean his coming to her level in the end.

Upon his return to the plains he had steeled his heart against her and she had felt the change in her first keen look. The desert wildness had not robbed her of the subtle intuitions of her sex. He did not see the fires of her hate. She hid them under the heavy-lashed eyelids, and she stiffled the hot pain in her breast. But the fires of her hate were burning and the pain in her breast was not dead. Twilight was creeping up the long valley and the girl's figure was blurred against the dull background.

"He shall not go," she said again and gazed over the edge of the cliff where the tiny gold locket had gone.

Then suddenly she stood erect listening. There was the quick, soft steps of padded feet among the cactus bushes, a rustle, and a low growl that sent a chill through the girl's warm veins. She sprang to her feet, lithe, quick-eyed and alert. There was no mistaking the sound. It was a panther. She felt in anticipation the sudden crushing of mouth and claws upon her, and every

muscle was nerved for resistance. But the beast seemed to be parrying an assault, and she peered into the cactus jungle at her back. Through the branches of a dwarf *saguara* she caught sight of a long, tense body crouched close above the ground. She watched it stealthily out of the tail of her eye. It was creeping forward with a sneaking, cat-like movement, but it was not coming directly toward her. The girl's head turned, following the animal's advance, but her body was still like the stiff, motionless cactus beside her. Her fingers tightened their grip on the knife and the breath came noiselessly through her parted lips. In a flash her mind took in every detail of the situation, the yawning chasm a few feet in front of her, the ragged mountain at her back, and the crouching beast advancing stealthily over the sand. All the fierceness and cunning of the desert-born animal was reflected in the tense suppleness of her pose. Only one thing puzzled her, and that was the direction of the panther's advance. She was losing the yellow form in the deeper bushes at her back. Suddenly there was a scuffling and snapping in the shadows, a man's low curse and the ripping of the panther's claws against coarse clothing. In a moment two bodies rolled struggling on the ground beside the girl. She saw the man's arms tense and knotted against the beast's shaggy breast. She saw his brown hair.

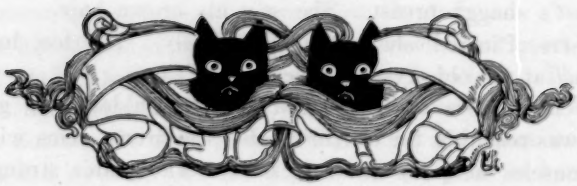
"Pierre, Pierre," she cried, breathlessly. He, too, had been lingering at the old trysting place.

The claws were buried in the man's shoulders, the grinning mouth was reaching for his throat, but the brown arms with their rigid muscles held the creature back. The man's strength was being tested to the uttermost. His body swayed above the brute's. His hands clutched the straining neck. They came nearer, almost against the girl's feet. She saw the man's arms bloody with cuts and scratches, his face white, his teeth set ; she could hear his hoarse breathing. As they turned toward her she plunged the knife into the panther's taut, yellow throat.

The angered beast whirled about suddenly, dropped the man's shoulders and sprang upon his new enemy. The girl crumpled under his weight, the knife fell, her hands clutched blindly at the open jaws. The man jumped to his feet. The panther leaped forward against the girl's body and the two, struggling together,

lurched over the cliff's edge and disappeared. The man flung himself on the ground and calling wildly, leaned far over the inscrutable depths.

But the girl did not answer. Her last glimpse of the world was a confused blur, the jagged cliff's edge and the sky's dull crimson whirling madly, and then the blue and purple depths rushing upward as her feet left the earth. And on the sand at the rock's edge the silver-handled knife lay dusty and blood-stained.



Without a Manager or Power.*

BY A. C. BUILDER.

Y present place of habitation and native town consists of a General Merchandise Store, a Cotton Gin and a Post Office where they deliver the mail, by means of the mail crane, to the Trans-Continental Flier that rushes by us. The place is located just above the confluence of one of the State's largest rivers and that river's greatest tributary, as the boys say : " We are in the forks of the Creek," with a good span of trestle work and bridges close on either side of us.

It had rained, rained, rained incessantly ; showers, a steady pour down for hours, then in drifting sheets when the wind arose, and finally terminating with a two hours' water spout in the forenoon of the third day. The rivers were overflooded, the creeks out of their banks and the smaller branches full ; the lower valleys overspread with a sheet of water as a lake, and the normally, well drained uplands so water soaked they were as miry as a peat bog. It was a Texas Flood, certainly no evidence lacking. A flood which had now completely annulled traffic through our station. We had had no train for twenty-four hours. The streams on either side of us were running over the bridges and deep enough to float the Battle Ship Oregon. All the locomotives that daily thundered by us being stopped, we truly felt our isolation.

Another twenty-four hours passed with no abatement of the flood ; it was now Sunday morning. A few of the villagers, I among them, were gathered at the Station platform awaiting any news that might arrive. Soon we saw coming across the bridge to the East of us what we presumed to be a Wrecking Train. It advanced slowly, feeling its way along to make sure the track was safe, having ahead of the engine a hand-car manned by four sweating Negroes. They slowly passed through our village ; a train of twenty cars. Seven of them were loaded with rock.

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Mounted on a long flat-car was a great crane and its adjuncts of large pulleys, hooks and numerous cables. There were several cars of long heavy timbers and ties; ready patterned to be used to hastily construct bridges. Two other cars were loaded with car trucks, repairs, tools, several hand-cars, dump-cars and other accessories. Then there were five dirty, vermin-begrimed boarding cars, one, an old iron-barred convict car that had formerly been used in the handling of convict labor in this department of railroad work. There were two kitchen cars out of which, as they passed, peeped several slatternly Mexican women and at one window was a little peart round-eyed Mexican baby. The other cars were double and triple decked sleepers. Perched on top of the cars, and in the doorways, and hanging to the steps carelessly ensconced, just anywhere to get a seat or foot-hold, were the working crew, consisting of, say thirty men of about equal numbers, Mexicans and Negroes, ignorant, degenerate, sooty, dirty, sullen: the lower strata of humanity — in the hard shift from a mangled wreck to a muddy washout and from a muddy washout to a mangled wreck again.

The rumble of their train died away as they neared the stream some two miles to the West. But to us simple villagers the picture of the benighted crew will not depart from our minds for days to come. When the train had about reached the stream as well as we could discern, we heard a shrill short painful-sounding blast of the whistle, as if in distress. We concluded that the bridge was gone, and curiosity seeking, departed in that direction at once, to see the Wrecker build a bridge on double quick time.

Arriving at the creek we found everything in consternation. The Wrecker was wrecked. They had found the water up to the rails on the bridge but the track seemed to be intact. The hand-car had crossed in advance without detecting anything wrong; the engine had cut loose and started over. Undiscernable to them the underpinning of the bridge, consisting of heavy cedar piling, was all gone and the upper timbers were merely floating like a pontoon. This precipitated the engine end over end down the stream in water over twenty feet deep, drowning the conductor, engineer, fireman and the "Boss" of the con-

struction gang, leaving the train without an engine, powerless to move, and the force without a manager to direct their work.

And just at this time arrived another citizen of the village with the report that several hundred feet of the track and high grade near the East bridge were entirely swept away. There they were, train and crew, without a manager or power, stranded between the two streams. No succor could reach them. Without intelligent direction they could do no work.

Approaching this stream the track paralleled the left base or foot of a high steep bluff, which was the creek's east bank and extended up the stream some distance an almost perpendicular boulder studded wall. The east abutment to the bridge was at this jutting base of the cliff. The main channel of the creek was seventy feet wide and now over twenty feet deep. And a broad bottom to the west was covered in water from two to eight feet deep. No force could get into this stream to construct a bridge until it "run down."

As onlookers we were standing upon the bluff contemplating the predicament that even the mighty Corporations sometimes get into. Some of the Negroes had already stretched themselves upon the side of the bluff in the sun. Others of the crew were making feeble attempts to regain from the stream the recently drowned bodies. Still others were staring around, knowing not what to do.

Sitting upon the end of the old convict car was a low heavy set straight-haired Mexican Indian. He had high cheek bones, a large mouth, a swarthy skin, copperish hued. He had been a peon on one of the great Haciendas in the Southern part of the Republic, but had redeemed himself and made his way across the Rio Grande to this great free country, only to be enlisted, as the first opportunity offered, in a service, his present employment, scarcely as light as the peonage. He shifted in his position, looked over the crew, scrutinized the rocky bluff, and as if from some natural prompting began to climb down from the car in a manner as though guided by an instinct not unlike that which, each recurring year, takes the wild goose to the southern skies before the flying of the snow.

He began giving commands in "Greaser Spanish." All of

the Mexicans and some of the Negroes began to move about unloading tools, cables, chains, a ponderous spool of steel rope, a long steel rail and a car axle with its two attached wheels. And then they began to move the cars back, uncoupling and rolling one and two at a time by means of the pinch bars. The entire train except three cars was in this way moved back several hundred feet.

They next dragged the rail, car axle and the chains and ropes to the top of the cliff. There the axle and rail were fastened together so as to make a great lever by the rail being stood up almost perpendicular. Against this was chained the car axle which was to act as the fulcrum. The lower end of the rail was firmly set in a crevice of a great boulder, the weight. The power was applied by one of the long cables, some three hundred and fifty feet in length, one end of which was tied to the upper end of the rail and the other end attached to the coupling of the first of the three cars one hundred and fifty feet distant. This gave about two hundred feet slack. Then the remainder of the cables and chains were tied around great overhanging boulders along the crest of the bluff, linking them together to the number of twenty, including the one against which the lever was set.

We now began to see his plan. But would it work? All hands came down the bluff, gathering the pinch bars as they came. They applied them to the car wheels, those that had no bars pushing with their hands. The aim was to accumulate enough momentum by the force of the three moving cars in the two hundred feet of slack to tilt the first boulder, by aid of the lever, over the edge of the precipice. As the tension of the cable increased, so the nervous tension of the crew and spectators also became greater, lest the plan would at the last moment fail. And then as the weight of all three of the cars came against it, a careening of the rail told that the rock was giving away. It eased slowly over the edge and then the great weight swung against the next attached boulder, easily upsetting its stability and that in turn played in like manner upon the next in quick succession, smashing and crunching into debris everything below as they tumbled one after the other by their gravity gained speed to the middle of the stream, splashing the water hundreds of feet high.

This thousand tons of stone heaped itself into a pile that was a stable stone pillar well above the surface when the water came to rest again, after the last had fallen in. The chains several times parted, but in no instance until the mammoth boulder next attached was loosed from its resting place of centuries.

The scheme had worked entirely. There was visible for a moment, but for a moment only, a frank smile over the heavy features of the straight-haired man who had superintended. Was it heredity? A little unextinguished flame of that engineering and constructing genius that was the central thought of his remote ancestors, the builders of Montezuma's stone cities and the great Peruvian Highway? And why is this people's genius dead?

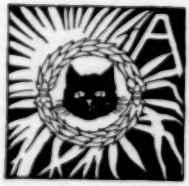
The noise of the chain of boulders splashing into the water had hardly died away when we saw the wrecking train from the Division west of us, approaching from that direction. This new crew, under an experienced "Boss," soon had girders laid from the bank to the new made pillar of stone, and a track constructed thereon.

The construction superintendent, when he contemplated the feat, said he would be glad to promote the originator if he was white and could write his name.

As we passed along the line of workmen on our way home, the broad headed Mexican was among a line of his compatriots, all with shovels in hand making a fill in a piece of washed out grade.

The Rise of a Plebe.*

BY GEORGE SAINT-AMOUR.



N aristocrat! No need to proclaim it or exhibit the family tree. Every action of Jones, his attitude toward all living things, his high coloring, his pompous walk — straight ahead, glancing neither to the right nor the left, was proof sufficient.

Jones felt a certain degree of contempt for nature, even. Mornings when he strutted from his house, with his seven wives demurely following, he looked with indifference at the volcano miles distant. If smoke were pouring from the crater, which was seldom, Jones's head went higher if possible. Sometimes he made more bold, and facing the smoking mountain would voice his defiance in no uncertain way.

When strong winds, carrying clouds of stinging sand, blew across the flat valley, sending all other living things to hasty indoor shelter, the various members of the Jones family, with Mr. Jones leading the stately procession, would march to a huge tree planted by the Master, and remain quiet, keenly observant, until the storm had spent its fury. Then Jones would step into the open and vociferously announce that he and his were superior to those things which drove others to frenzied flight. Being broad and stout, well preserved and strong of lung, Jones looked very impressive upon such occasions. His wives thought him a great personage, indeed.

When the Master distributed food — which he always did after these elemental disturbances — none of the wives ventured to eat until invited by Jones to do so. No man could deny the superior, even lordly bearing, of the aristocrat as he superintended the feasting of his numerous family. It rarely occurred that the Master failed to provide prepared articles of food, but if it did

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so happen, there was plenty of small game to which Jones would call the attention of his several dependents. Indian-like, it were apparently beneath his dignity to kill and fetch for them. Walking about, high-headed, it was given to him to see these small unfortunates and indicate in a loud voice their presence; some other early member of the family caught the worm.

Jones had passed the physical labor stage; his raison d'être was direction. Jones's philosophy: "There are those, of course, who must work — to provide for us."

Once an eclipse of the sun slightly darkened the earth, and all living things in the vicinity of the Jones residence scurried to places of safety, except Jones. He marched boldly into the open and declared and exhorted against such unseemliness. He strutted and argued. Next morning the sun shone bright and warm. A great triumph for Jones!

So Jones lived in pomp and glory, his vanity unchecked, his self-esteem uninterruptedly increasing, his peace of mind undisturbed, until the advent of a certain plebeian Mr. White with his two wives.

Early on a hot August day, while the Jones family were sauntering quietly about their exclusive bit of earth — theirs by divine right, according to Jones — an oblong, swirling, twisting, threatening black cloud appeared in the direction of the volcano. When the Mesdames Jones saw it they became much frightened, and immediately looked to their lord and master for guidance, which was forthcoming, as usual. They were directed to retire within the house, while Jones remained outside, gazing with defiant eye at the sky. Great trees were uprooted and tossed aside; trembling an instant over the river, the cloud suddenly swooped and left the river bed temporarily dry.

Now the black mass was almost directly overhead. It swerved earthward and broke, scattering in all directions, as Jones, thoroughly cowed, retired nearer and nearer his door. He observed, however, that three white objects had been left lying on the ground. After a while these objects resolved themselves into living things, and what was Jones's astonishment to see that they were of his own image!

Mr. White, agreeably surprised at finding himself and his

wives practically unharmed, quite naturally led them in the direction of the nearest habitation.

The White family did not unnecessarily intrude, however. Observing Jones, who had immediately assumed a haughty attitude and stationed himself in front of his house with his family surrounding him, the Whites turned their steps to the big tree. There they chattered excitedly amongst themselves, while Jones turned to his group of admirers and presumably lectured them on the folly of indiscriminate friendships. These newcomers were of inferior class — they did not carry themselves like the Joneses — they were dressed in dull yellow-white, in striking contrast to the brilliant attire of the Joneses.

The tornado had first destroyed White's home and then whisked him to an unknown locality; so, leaving the two Mrs. Whites to rest under the tree, Mr. White soon started on a tour of investigation. As Jones looked at his unwelcome guest he was forced to acknowledge that, although White lacked caste, he was a fine-looking fellow, tall, lithe, clear-eyed, quick, energetic. White seemed duly impressed with the majesty of Jones, too, for he approached him with a quite deferential manner, uttering pleasant sounds in a low voice — but which were entirely lost upon Jones, who had no desire to understand. Anyhow, White's language was a different language — it was the language of a lower stratum.

When White saw Jones's back turned upon him he looked deprecatingly at his own faded dress, which, perhaps, resembled worn, washed overalling, and although he seemed slightly ashamed of it, he squared his shoulders and continued his way as independently, if not as unconcernedly, as Jones.

By mutual consent the two families kept strictly to themselves. The Joneses were repellingly tolerant. The Master had not made his appearance for some time, but there was fortunately an abundance of game, and Mr. Jones with ostentatious, patronizing generosity, always left a portion for the Whites. Jones was highly offended that White should prefer to forage for himself, displaying an unaccountable desire to care for his own. To Jones's way of thinking, White should have been glad to accept what was so freely left at his disposal.

Several times during the succeeding week White and Jones

came into close proximity on their hunting expeditions, and on these occasions Jones was much disappointed that White was not more impressed by his air of condescension. True, White invariably left the vicinity, but never with so much celerity as Jones thought meet and proper.

At night the Joneses retired to their house while the Whites made the big tree, out of danger, their lodging place. To the aristocrat this was amusing. He can be imagined saying: "Tree dwellers! Well, that is their proper place."

And so the two might have lived at peace, tolerantly, mildly critical, had not trouble been precipitated, as it generally is, by feminine influence. The younger Mrs. White was pretty. She was round and plump and healthy, and it did not take many days for her to recover from her terrible experience in the tornado. Soon she was beautifying herself by various means and the result was not lost upon the aristocrat. It may have been accidental, but it always happened that when Mrs. White looked her best she appeared in the vicinity of Jones. On such occasions Jones utterly ignored White and, to the dismay of the Mesdames Jones, paid open court to the pretty Mrs. White! Jones several times called his own people about him, leaving the choicest morsels for his new favorite. It was not long before White's offerings were coldly rejected. No matter how industriously he hunted nor how successful he might be, his pretty young wife invariably found something more to her liking at the aristocrat's board.

Love is blind, but one fine day White saw. Up to this time he had not assumed any of the responsibilities of the general establishment. Quite unwittingly he had relegated himself to an humble position. He waited for Jones to give alarm of any outside danger that might threaten. It was Jones who rang the curfew bell, so to speak, and it was Jones who announced the dawn of morning. Domestic infelicity, however, aroused the sleeping White. Stalking up to Jones—who at the moment was entertaining the faithless wife with some tale of his own greatness and richness — White looked so hard at her that she quailed and fled to the vicinity of the tree. Then White, the plebeian, stared so insolently at Jones, the aristocrat, that the latter was unpleasantly reminded of revolution, dynamite, an uprising of the mob. Jones

brusquely turned away; he must not demean himself by quarreling. But he walked slowly, pondering the wretched tendency of the times when the poor were being taught to think themselves the equal of their natural superiors. Jones was satisfied, though, that reflection would show White his error. Then all would be well. The younger Mrs. White would gladly fly to the protection of the superior class where comfort awaited. So the next day Jones again accosted the susceptible one and led her away. At the moment White was busy—as became one of his class, working —and did not see what occurred. An instant later, however, noticing that the various Mrs. Joneses were sulking, he divined the cause.

Jones was inexpressibly shocked when he saw White cuff and browbeat his wife and order her home to the big tree. Of course it was what he expected, considering the source, but it was nevertheless shocking. He gave White the benefit of his most chilling stare and swelled with pride when the plebeian became visibly embarrassed. As White walked away Jones followed him, threatening to cut off his supplies if White did not come to his senses. Then White turned and looked so defiant that Jones flew into a fit of apoplectic rage, at which White fled incontinently. This was as it should be. Jones pondered the matter and decided that he had been too lenient. Beginning with the morrow he would see to it that White appreciated his lowly position. And he kept his promise. At the morning meal he shouldered White out of the way and peremptorily ordered him home, while the females ate their fill. After all had satisfied their hunger, Jones led them away and felt considerable sarcastic satisfaction at the sight of White stealthily slipping from his place under the tree to eat and drink. Immediately Jones thought White had eaten sufficient he sauntered toward the plebeian and the latter, after a brief hesitancy, again retired to obscurity. Jones walked to and fro several times, the better to impress White with his inferiority. Brazen young Mrs. White joined the aristocrat, and together they remained in plain sight of the wretched husband. Jones was particularly gallant; White could not but acknowledge that Jones's superior position in the world had given him a taking way with the sex, and he forgot himself to the extent of straightening out

his powerful frame and taking a few steps toward his unfaithful spouse and her charmer. Catching one glimpse, however, of the supercilious look in Jones's eye, he retired crestfallen. He even went around to the other side of the tree to hide his misery.

Jones did not allow White any midday meal. It was as well to thoroughly discipline the presumptuous offspring of the proletariat now as later, he calculated. During the long afternoon aristocrat Jones worked all the schemes known to his class — and they were many — for the humiliation of White. Several times he gathered his own wives and the two Mrs. Whites near the Master's tree and talked to them at length about the folly of those who aspired to stations for which they were unfitted. Husband White writhed. He did not, could not, accept such reactionary theories. He felt that he was the equal of Jones or any other — yet precedent kept him silent. When evening approached, in plain sight of all, Jones swaggered to White and harangued him in a loud, arrogant voice. White moved around to the other side of the tree. Jones followed, and they circled the tree several times. White's head was down; he was so thoroughly intimidated that he shuffled as he walked, and Jones was correspondingly elated.

Leaving White under the tree, hungry, lonely, sick at heart, bitter against all his kind, hunched into a dejected heap, the autocrat led the seven Mrs. Joneses and the two Mrs. Whites to his house. At the door Jones paused and directed a parting withering look at White. But White did not see it; he did not see or realize anything much, except that he was deserted.

For some little time he heard peaceful, contented chattering inside the Jones home. It roused him so that for the first time during the long, miserable day he walked away from the tree, away from the sound of the hateful voices.

Gradually, however, his reason reasserted itself. Why should he permit this flabby, over-fed, arrogant individual to thus humiliate him? Where had gone all his ideas of equality, democracy? Who had given Jones this land and the right to dictate to all upon it? White resolutely turned his steps toward the Jones place and ate and drank what he could find about the premises. All was peaceful in the house. He did not venture near it.

The semi-tropical moon gave light almost equal to day. It reassured White, who had primitive man's dread of darkness. He wandered down the valley and with each step his confidence in himself returned. He glanced up and down his supple frame, and felt bitter shame that he had not put to use the muscles with which nature had endowed him.

At thought of personal conflict with Jones, true, he felt a thrill of horror, but why not? Were they not the same? Jones looked different, somehow, but in what way did he differ? White was sure that he could out-hunt, out-run, out-fight any born aristocrat!

White whirled impulsively in his tracks. He would not submit. He would assert his rights. It was the old White, walking with a swing that betokened clean, plain living, who made his way back to the Jones house. The air of cringing helplessness had entirely disappeared. He stationed himself outside the door. It were foolish to attack one in one's own home, he reasoned. As the long night passed away the resolution of the plebeian grew stronger and stronger and he welcomed with grim delight the first cock crow. Soon he would demonstrate that he was no craven. Why, better be whipped than be a coward! He swung his vigorous limbs! He would not be whipped!

More lordly, more pompous than ever, Jones emerged into the open air at the head of his whole ménage. But he stopped, astounded, when he saw the defiant plebeian facing him just outside the door. He looked contemptuously at his victim, but the victim, instead of retreating, advanced a trifle. "So tiresome," thought Jones. Would this foolish individual never learn his place? Must he again admonish him? Turning, Jones observed that his nine dependents had noted White's new attitude and were ranged in a row in front of the door, waiting developments.

This would not do. Jones advanced upon White, uttering sounds of warning — and before he realized what happened he received a stunning blow on the head. While he paused to regain his dignity he was again struck, harder than the first blow.

One of Jones's great-great-grandfathers had been a fighter of renown. The old spirit was resurrected, and Jones went to the fray with vim, all the time looking at White with the eye of the superior, which had proven so effective the previous day. It were

better to squelch White than beat him; for fighting was vulgar. But White was not to be awed. He fought so vigorously, so aggressively, that in a very short time Jones found himself breathing laboriously. His most effective blows did not seem to bother White in the least, while at each blow from White, Jones reeled. In the struggle the combatants had worked to such a position that Jones now faced his own wives and the wives of White. Could it be possible that they were pleased at his discomfiture? He made a desperate rally, and when White sent him sprawling he was sure that all the females purposely moved to a position directly back of the plebeian, as if to lend him their moral support. That was the crusher. It broke his proud heart. He ran — as White maintained those of his class must inevitably do if confronted by real difficulty.

Both were bruised and bloody, though most of the crimson stain on White came from Jones's wounds. Jones had one eye completely closed; the top of his head was a mass of sores; he was bedraggled and exhausted.

When the aristocrat made his way to the Master's tree, almost crawling, it seemed to White a time for exultation, so the plebeian mounted the step of the door of the aristocrat's home and shouted long and loud. Jones's wives remained with White — no one offered sympathy to Jones, the dethroned autocrat. In his mastery he had been domineering; in his misery he was left to suffer unheeded. Suffering exceedingly from thirst, feverish and weak, he timidly approached the water supply, carrying himself like the eldest former Mrs. Jones, who was now a Mrs. White. He was talking to himself, in a high-pitched, feminine voice.

White, standing erect and proud, looked scornfully at the humiliated aristocrat. It had been easy to prick the bubble of hereditary superiority.

So ended the struggle and thus was settled for all time a barnyard sociological problem between useful, humble Leghorns and high-priced, ornamental Buff-Cochins.

A Little Tragedy at Fort-o-Doom.*

BY M. WOODRUFF NEWELL.

HE was a little tinsel thing, with cheap yellow hair and a strange, small, laughing mouth, and she drifted into Fort-o-Doom, from some vague place way east, early in August.

It appeared later that she was a niece of Old Man Shields, and as Mrs. Shields was more or less acceptable to the civilized society which was necessarily limited on the Rosebud Reservation, Theresa soon found herself on fairly secure footing. Her health had not been good, she explained carefully, hence her exodus from the east on this visit; but she did not look ill.

Indian Agent Billy Crawford told his sister bluntly that he did not like her.

"She is as shallow as Plum Creek," he drawled, "besides being lots more dangerous. Keep away."

But Felice, eastern born and bred herself, found it very hard to keep away.

The Shields lived next to the Agency buildings, and Theresa, fresh from New York, was full to the brim of all that was going on there, plays, music, manners and styles, and was an artist in the telling. She was but a year older than Felice, yet she had all the poise of a woman.

To Felice, four years on the Reservation with her brother, and sick to death of rolling cattle lands and wheat farms, sick to death of dirty wooden houses thatched with sod and straw, sick to death of dirty Indians and dirtier squaws and papooses, even sick to death of the brilliant sunshine and the witchery of sunset and sunrise on the far away majestic horizon line, to Felice, still half a child despite her twenty years, Theresa was a marvel, and she reveled in her tales of home.

Fort-o-Doom was not an exciting place. It was but a small

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section of the great Rosebud Reservation, and its two hundred lazy Indians only moved when they were prodded. They raised a few crops by the hardest pushing and were concerned chiefly in how to get fire-water.

Felice had found it very lonely. Any romantic notions of country, or people, that she may have had in the beginning, had long since vanished before the deadly monotony of living in a dirty Indian town, in a shabby, draughty house where housekeeping was only made easy by Billy's most strenuous efforts. They had no luxuries. They had few comforts.

"How can you stay on here," she wondered aloud, once to Theresa, as they rode along by Plum Creek, their cow-ponies picking their own way over the great plain, luxuriant with sage grass.

Theresa smiled oddly.

"I have not yet seen what I came to find," she said.

"Oh," puzzled Felice, conscious of a vague uneasiness. "If it were not for Billy I should go back east to live with my aunt to-morrow,— but I cannot leave Billy."

"Yes," Theresa nodded. "There is always Billy,— or some one else."

Felice's pale colorless face flushed hotly.

Theresa smiled again, to herself. Was it true what her aunt had hinted, she wondered? This pale creature and Capt. Rawlins Dunbar? Well, she would soon see. His taste must have changed much in this year and a half that he had been west.

"There are blue coats coming over from Fort Pierre in another week, I suppose, to help in getting the Indians started for the other reservation. I am glad. I do love a nice little bunch of blue coats." Theresa laughed.

Felice did not answer. She was pondering over what Theresa had said. Who was she waiting there to see? Not — Rawlins Dunbar? He had gone home to Washington, in June. He would be back here, soon, perhaps with the boys from Fort Pierre. It was not possible that Theresa meant him? She would not ask. indeed, she dared not, she was sick with a sudden presentiment.

He had taken away the dreariness of this last winter, for her. Such rides as they had had together, such long, long talks

by the fire through the long, biting winter evenings, and they had scarcely missed a day of the beautiful spring and early summer. Billy and he, too, had grown to be fast friends.

There had been no plighted troth, yet she thought that she had known, but now,— she was afraid. She felt strangely childish beside Theresa. Had she imagined things, built her dreams on a silly flirtation? She took everything too seriously, it had always been her way. She loved fun, but she could not jest with life and death, — and dreams, as this happy Theresa did.

The memory of his words when he left her in June, fretted her now with a tiny worry. Had he meant what she thought?

"In two months, Felice, I will be back,—and you —?"

What she had answered burnt her now like a flame.

"I will be here," she had promised soberly, and he had kissed her. That was all; but it had been enough, then. Now, it was not enough.

She was not conscious of any of her own slim young grace and comeliness, and Theresa was very lovely, very lovely. She was afraid, she did not know of what. Afraid of something, somewhere, sometime, before she had ever seen him, — and a shallow tinsel creature who, she knew now, with swift, fearful instinct, was also waiting for his coming.

August was almost gone, when, one morning sixty soldiers came over from Fort Pierre, and, with them, Capt. Rawlins Dunbar. The Great Father at Washington had decided, at last, that the Indians must move again, further west toward the Black Hills, and there might be a little unpleasantness.

Felice, trembling, went down-stairs to the big living-room, when Billy called her, to greet Captain Dunbar.

The day was warm and she wore a thin, old-fashioned yellow muslin, that showed her slim white throat, and childish arms.

He was standing, waiting, young, and big and straight. His dark, handsome face flushed a little, dully, as she came shyly toward him, and put out her hand.

But before he could speak there was a sound in the open doorway that made them both turn, and yet Felice knew, even before she looked, whom it would be.

Afterward she tried to remember what they had talked about,

but she could not, and then, he had gone out with Theresa, walking over to the Shields house with her.

Felice knew above all else that these two had met before, but he had not admitted it, nor Theresa, and she herself had played her part in the little comedy — or was it a tragedy — and introduced them calmly. She wondered what was to come.

The soldiers lounged about the reservation, coming and going between the small log fort, a mile and a half away, and the Agency buildings, where they made themselves quite at home between tiresome drills and other daily routine of fort life. The situation of the place was unusual. At the time the fort had been established a new Agency building had been planned beside it, but it had never been built. The fort was on a small hill. The old Agency building was nearer the Creek, on lower ground, and a mile and a half between them was always a matter of sarcastic comment to the ones most concerned.

Meanwhile the plans for the opening of the reservation to the homeseekers went busily on.

The evenings were very merry. They had card parties and dances. During the day they took long rides about the country. Felice had cavaliers a plenty, rarely now was it Captain Rawlins alone, as it had been all the winter and spring before.

He and Theresa seemed to be playing some strange game that Felice did not know. He would keep away for days, then, of a sudden, her shining yellow head would seem to bewitch him until he was blind and deaf to everything else.

Felice shut her eyes these days, for fear of what she might see. Even the sight of the two together seemed to arouse a still fury in her that she had never even guessed she possessed. What was this creature to him that he should forget every one else and follow her? But Felice asked no question aloud. She and Theresa met, as usual, so far as appearances went. The present held misery enough for her, she did not want to know what had been before. She had been a child, and she had loved him simply, seriously, as was her way. She was no child now. In a day she had come into womanhood, but the love died hard, for that also was her way.

Billy, looking on, tried, in his stupid man fashion, to help what

he did not understand and only Felice knew how much harder he made it for her.

Matters grew very bad at Fort-o-Doom in the next few weeks. There was no rain. The grass burned brown like parchment, and the dry blades cracked like an old man's bones under the roving feet of cattle and ponies. The Indians, too, held long councils together and would not agree to the proposed plan of the Great Father at Washington.

The big Sioux Chief Joseph spoke at last, standing up within the great circle of his braves, and facing the white men who had taken country and game from them, and yet wanted more.

It was late in the afternoon, and the sun behind him, like a copper disc, was dropping to the horizon. Its rays caught the reds and yellows in his gaudy blanket and brought them out richly.

"You make speeches too long," he complained. "All day yesterday you talked. We cannot remember what you say. My heart is sad. I have traveled all the trails. Where you want us to go it is all stones. Our cattle will starve. The little children will starve. Hear me, my chiefs. I am tired. Why does the Great Father take away all our good land and give it to bad white men. We were here first. We will not go."

The great General answered him diplomatically. He was at the head of the army of the North West, and he spoke with authority. Orders were orders, they must go.

Chief Joseph went back to his people silently, hopelessly.

The long wait that followed is now a matter of history, although its details are meagre. And what came afterwards, at Fort-o-Doom did not amount to enough at the time to even get into print. The loss of one or two unofficial lives is of small account.

Three more weeks the Indians debated and held their council fires. Felice, from her small bedroom window, could see them stalking solemnly together, hour after hour, their dirty blankets wrapped majestically about them, their ugly faces sullen and set.

The soldiers seemed to feel little alarm, but Billy Crawford looked anxious and slept with his boots on. He had even suggested that Felice should go away till the question was settled, but she

had laughed at him. Then, at the last, the trouble came suddenly and found them napping.

It was a sultry, breathless night. The sky was like black velvet. Felice sat upon the floor by her window, her heavy head upon the sill. She had no heart for sleep. The low-raftered ceiling seemed to press down upon her like a hand and choke out her breath. To the little tinsel creature it was all a comedy, — life itself was a comedy, — but not so to Felice.

It was very late, long after midnight, and yet surely that was a figure moving, out by the shed where the ponies were kept.

She strained her eyes and ears into the smothering darkness. There was no sound of foot-fall. It was not one of the soldiers. It was not Billy. Only an Indian moved like that, crouching and silently, like some horrible shadow.

She called Billy softly and in an instant he was beside her. He looked only once, his sharp trained eyes narrowed to mere slits.

"God, they are blaming me for all this, and there is going to be H—— to pay, and about seventy men to pay it with,— if the boys get here in time."

"Shall we make for the Fort?"

"No. It is too late. We are surrounded, though probably they are not all in it, only the dare-devil young braves and the worst of the old ones. Stay quiet while I go down and wake the boys downstairs. Three of them slept here last night."

While he was gone she found her own gun, then sat down, shaking, on the narrow stairs. She could hear little Frank Evans excited whisper: "Blisters! What's to do now?"

She wondered what had become of the poor boys on guard. She went over them in her mind, burly John Peters, and Hawkins, and pretty Sam Stone with his pink and whiteness, and Lansing,— she shivered. All dead, probably. Would it be Billy,— and she, soon, and perhaps Rawlins, and the little tinsel creature? She thought of her suddenly, and whispered down the dark stairs to Billy.

"Mrs. Shields and Theresa are all alone next door. Mr. Shields has gone to Fort Pierre."

Billy swore energetically.

"If I try to get them over here, it will sure start the fuss, but,— it is coming anyway, and the quicker the boys at the Fort get wind of the racket and trot over here, the better for us."

But before Billy could do anything the two women suddenly rushed out of their door across the little open space. They had awakened, too, and seeing their peril, taken the only chance that they had.

Billy and little Frank Evans ran out, and brought them safely within the door of the Agency, but, in that instant, the place became alive with redskins.

Billy turned once and shot. One black figure went down, but a dozen more sprang up where he had fallen. Then the boys barred the big door and fired through the windows.

The three women crouched, shivering, upstairs. Only Felice, loading and reloading her gun, did her part with what shaking courage she could muster.

"Oh, why don't the boys come?" sobbed Mrs. Shields, her thin black hair wild about her fat, greasy face.

"They must be here soon," Felice whispered. "See, the shed is afire."

"It is a funny way to die," Theresa said once, hiding her face in the loose sleeve of her pink kimono. "I never thought of going this way."

They could hear the rapid fire of the four guns downstairs, they could hear now and then a horse's sharp whinney, but above all was that hideous war-cry.

"Aw-oh-aw-oh-aw-oh."

And in the flame-lighted yard were running brown figures, with blazing torches held high above their war-decked heads.

Billy came to the foot of the stairs.

"They are afraid to push us," he said. "They do not know just how many we are. Watch that east corner, Felice. There is a devil there with a torch he is trying to plant. If those boys don't come in five minutes, why, God help us. What in Heaven makes them so slow?"

Theresa wet her dry lips, and crept over to Felice at the window.

"I am sorry," she whispered, her yellow hair soft about her pretty face.

Felice did not pretend to misunderstand.

"It is all right, dear," she answered, gently. Her rage at this weak little creature, and her own misery seemed now very far away.

"It is all right, if you will only love him enough and be true."

Theresa choked.

"I am not good enough," she said. He knew it before. He knows it now. I wasn't ever good, but I bewitch him, somehow. He can not help it. With me two days away he would be glad he had escaped,—but with me close at hand,—ah"—she laughed a little, hysterically, and put her soft lips to Felice's hand.

Felice shrank.

"I know," said Theresa, bluntly. "You don't understand. You can't, but if anything happens I just wanted to tell you that I am sorry I have hurt you, you have been good to me, and if I had known that there was a girl here, good, like you, whom he was fond of, I should not have come out to find him,—again."

Of a sudden her voice broke.

But there was no more time for words. Outside was the thud, thud of horses' feet, coming like mad, and the four boys from below were in the room barricading the flimsy door with the furniture.

"They are in downstairs," said Billy sharply, "and they are so fighting crazy they do not care whether the soldiers are coming or not. Felice, if it is the end, I'll get to you before those cursed reds."

It seemed scarcely a second that the door held.

It went down suddenly with a crash, splintering and breaking, and the room was alive with the hideous painted faces of yelling young braves.

It was like some horrible dream come true, to Felice. When she had first come to the reservation she had imagined things like this nightly, but longer sojourn had worn away her fears, until she had forgotten that these people were not civilized, that their

savageness only slept, held down by rigid law and order and constant watchfulness.

She shut her eyes.

The boys were fighting desperately. Even now the soldiers were on the stairs. If they could but hold out a second more,—just a second more.

Then an ugly brown hand caught Felice by her long braid and dragged her out from behind Billy.

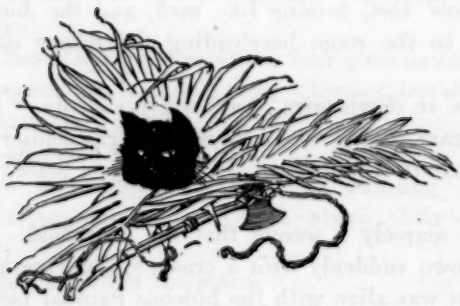
"Heap-a-hair," he yelled, and raised his knife joyously.

Felice, in one numbed glance, saw the blue coats piling in over the broken door, saw Billy, too, spring toward her, but they were all too late.

Theresa had cast herself furiously forward upon the Indian.

Felice, thrown, dazed and unhurt, to one side, saw the thin knife go down, once, twice, saw the yellow head fall silently backward.

The little tinsel creature had played out the comedy in her own strange way.



Smedley's Stumbling-Stone to Matrimony.*

BY FRANK M. BICKNELL.

NEVER before had I seen "Smiler" Smedley's cheerfulness so much in eclipse; the threatened failure of his most daring financial exploit could not have brought to his face such another worried look as it now bore.

"Do brace up a little, Smedley," I exclaimed; "there are worse experiences in life than getting married. What's the matter with your nerves? Why, man, I believe you're actually shaking — "

"Yes, trying to shake off a presentiment that something will happen to queer the ceremony," he answered gloomily. "Boys, I have a foreboding that there's going to be another hitch beside the hymeneal tie-up between now and to-morrow eve. I'm in the hands of my friends and must expect the worst."

"One would think you were going to the halter instead of the altar," said Delaville. "Do you suspect anybody in particular?"

Delaville, a professional actor out of an engagement, and I, an amateur actor about to go into one — as Smedley's best man — were sitting with the bridegroom-elect in the parlor of his suite at the Belfontaine on Tuesday evening. The wedding was billed for 8 P. M., Wednesday, December 29.

"I suspect everybody," answered Smedley, seeming to get bogged still deeper in his pessimistic mood, "but especially I am haunted by delirious dreams of a small, fair man with gold-rimmed glasses and a recently married air."

"Hargrave!" cried Delaville and I together.

"The same. If I could hermetically seal up that man for thirty-six hours from date I should feel as if a snare had been removed from my path. I tried to get him for an usher, hoping to keep him out of mischief, but he said a married man shouldn't usurp the prerogatives of a bachelor."

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Smedley grinned reminiscently for a moment, then gloom again overcast his brow. Delaville and I exchanged glances. In times not long past Smedley's diabolical ingenuity, joined to his inveterate love for practical joking, had given many a prospective benedict a bad quarter of an hour. And the trick he had sprung on poor Hargrave, almost at the last moment, had been especially cruel and humiliating. No wonder the victimizer feared reprisals from one or more of his victims !

" Whatever happens, it probably won't be fatal," said I. " Make an effort and cheer up."

" I can't " he answered pathetically. " The demon of disquiet holds me in thrall. The spirit of peace and tranquillity has folded her wings and silently stolen away. The dove with the olive-branch has flew the coop. My prophetic soul scents trouble in the offing. Seriously, boys, this fool funny business at weddings is being carried altogether too far. Such an occasion ought to be too solemn for indulgence in monkey-shines. I'd have liked to make a quiet affair of it myself, just we two and the parson; but Lida decreed otherwise, so my bachelor existence is to end in a blaze of glory at St. Luke's — with fireworks thrown in that were not made and provided for in the marriage contract, I greatly fear."

He sank into his former dejection, and though we tried to reassure him he was not to be roused from it. After Delaville — who had an engagement with a brother professional — had gone Smedley burst out all at once, self-reproachfully :

" Write me down an idiot and underscore it! Why couldn't I have held my tongue before that chap? I saw mischief in his eye, confound him! He's out of a job, and you know what Satan finds for idle hands to do."

" Oh, Del is all right," I hastened to say, " he wouldn't be up to any pranks, don't you fear it. He isn't a comedian, he plays heavies."

" True, but he's a good deal of a jollier nevertheless, and he and Hargrave used to be as thick as thieves — worse luck that I didn't remember it earlier! And then the other fellows — I can't escape them all. I'm a marked man with a price on my head. My progress to the altar will be beset — it'll be a real obstacle

race. If one thing doesn't down me another will. How I wish day after to-morrow were here!"

"Your nerves are a little ragged from late hours and all," said I; "you'd better go to bed and see what a night's sleep will do for you."

"I think I'll take your advice," he said. "This getting ready to be married does rather rattle a man. I don't seem to feel quite gilt-edged somehow. I'm not sure I haven't a cold coming on, with my other trials and responsibilities. Well, you'll be around in good season to-morrow P. M., eh?"

I promised and went away, not wholly easy in my mind. Being a best man carries with it more duties than one, and I felt that so far as lay in my power I must play guardian angel to my principal. Without knowing just what form the retaliation of Smedley's former victims would take, I feared it would not be entirely good-natured. The fun, such as it was, would be rather strenuous. Nor could I blame Hargrave, at least, if the memory of how he had been made a laughing-stock by Smedley still rankled and caused him to thirst for revenge.

When I reentered Smedley's apartments, shortly after dusk next day, I found him looking lugubrious enough. The cold he had half expected seemed to have got him in its grip. One of his cheeks was swollen enormously and was fiery red, either from inflammation or poulticing, or both. I gazed at him aghast and speechless.

"Toothache — cold settled in it — nearly lost my voice, too," he explained in a husky whisper.

"What will you do?" I asked, much dismayed at the news.

"Go ahead, of course," he said stoically. "A postponed wedding would be a calamity; Lida never would get over it. I hope, however, this affliction will move the boys to have a little pity and let up on their tomfoolery. I've dosed the tooth with creosote and tried poulticing to reduce my superfluous cheek — without much effect. Before going out I shall tie up my face well to prevent my getting any more cold, and after the wedding it will be southward ho! for balmy Florida.

"Now, my dear fellow," he continued, "let's to business. Listen to what may be the last words of a single man. Firstly, I

propose that we leave here an hour earlier than advertised, and try to throw our friends the jokers off the scent. Secondly, and this is vitally important, if anything should happen, if — well, for instance, if those fellows should manage to kidnap or otherwise detain me, I wish you to leave me to my fate, and get away, up to St. Luke's as quickly as you can and tell Lida I'm coming too, understand ?"

"What!" I remonstrated.

"Yes, I mean it. I've a card up my sleeve for use in the last extremity, and I don't think I shall delay the ceremony more than fifteen or twenty minutes at the worst. Now don't forget that it's you to the church on the jump if the bold, bad men collar me. Don't stay and mix up in my fuss, but git — simply *git*!"

Though I did not at all understand his drift, or get any inkling of his intended tactics, I well knew his amazing resourcefulness, and gave him my word to obey orders to the letter.

At six o'clock we had something to eat — or I did, for Smedley's tooth and generally nervous state had deprived him of even the semblance of an appetite — and afterward I helped him to tie up his face in a black silk muffler. I prevailed on him to return to his bedroom and lie down again for a few minutes, and when, at half-past six the carriage was announced I knocked at his door.

An inarticulate sound, evidently vocal, responded, and presently he appeared, bundled in a heavy overcoat, with face covered to the eyes, and exhaling a strong smell of creosote.

"How do you feel now?" I asked anxiously.

"About the same — no worse, I guess," he mumbled through the folds of the handkerchief, and we went down to the carriage.

When we were safely shut up in the darkness, he, I and the creosote, our driver, who had had his instructions, started off down town. It was hoped that by thus setting out in the opposite to our proper direction and making a wide detour, we might hoodwink the conspirators who, Smedley was sure, were on our track, and baffle their plans.

The first part of our drive was a silent one. All the curtains of the carriage had been drawn, so I could see nothing distinctly, but I thought my companion was holding on to his face, and, from

an occasional half-stifled imprecation, I inferred that he was suffering considerable discomfort from his aching tooth. Apparently our cabby was "on to his job," for the route he took was so devious that soon I could not even have guessed what quarter of the town he had got us into. By and by I raised one of the shades a moment and peered out. Without being able to locate our whereabouts exactly, I knew we must be far down in the lower part of the city. This discovery made me uneasy, and I fancied Smedley was becoming so as well. I let down the window in one of the doors, leaned out, and with the aid of my stick, managed to get the driver's attention.

"You ought to be heading the other way," I admonished him in a low tone; "it's getting late and we're a long distance from the church."

He bent toward me and whispered back guardedly: "I know it, boss, but there's a keb follerin' us and has been ever since we quit the hotel. I have been tryin' to give it the shake, but I ain't made out to yet. He's a good deal of a clinger, but I'll lose him, gi' me a little more time — trust me."

For perhaps fifteen minutes we zigzagged about, turning corners and bumping crazily over cobble-paved streets. I had now become so uneasy that even without the jolting I could hardly have sat still. It was only too evident that Smedley's "friends," far from being deluded, were hot on his trail. After awhile our progress grew smoother and our speed increased materially. I raised the shade and perceived that we were in one of the great north and south avenues. Hope sprang up in my breast, and I had just begun to think we had outdistanced our pursuers — or shadowers — when, to an accompaniment of quick hoof-beats, a carriage raced up alongside, and an authoritative voice ordered our driver to stop — a command which was obeyed with a promptness both startling and uncomfortable for us, the passengers. My companion, thrown violently over against me, clutched my wrist and whispered:

"Remember your promise!"

"All right," I said, and there was no time for more before a thick-set, determined looking man, with a revolver in his hand, stepped from the vehicle which had brought us to. He was fol-

lowed by two others, both police officers, in uniform. He opened our carriage door and, lowering his weapon slightly, said, civilly enough:

"It's no use your trying to make a get-away, Mr. Smedley. I'm sorry to trouble you at this particular time, but I'll have to ask you to come with me. I've got a warrant for your arrest."

Though Hargrave had not shown much originality, this old, old trick would probably serve his purpose as well as a brand-new one.

My companion mumbled something which his wrapped-up mouth made nearly unintelligible, but which I transmitted as,

"He wishes to know what the charge is. He has an ulcerated tooth and a bad throat," I added explanatorily.

"All the more reason why we shouldn't stop here in the cool for any chin-chin," returned the officer crisply. "The station is near and it's warm there; and the sergeant can furnish particulars. I and one of my men will get in here with you, Mr. Smedley; if your friend wants to go along he can find room in our cab, I guess."

A quick, furtive grip on my arm admonishing me that it was my play to "fade away" and keep to the line of action laid out for me, I excused myself unostentatiously, descended from the carriage and walked off as rapidly as practicable. It was now nearly twenty minutes to eight, and, on looking around, I saw that I was fully two miles from St. Luke's, with no available conveyance in sight. I hurried along the nearest cross street to another avenue where, after a hazardous delay, I found an unengaged taxi-cab, and directed the driver to "burn the road" between there and St. Luke's. So literally did he obey me that in his headlong haste he burned out a fuse, or melted a connection, or broke something which brought him to a dead standstill, and left me with a last long lap of my course to traverse afoot.

Church weddings seldom start on railroad schedule, yet my conviction that Smedley could not possibly clear himself of whatever trumped up charge had been brought against him in season to arrive on the scene of action much if any before nine o'clock had thrown me into a fever of anxiety. When I reached the entrance of St. Luke's I halted in dismay. I was forced to halt, indeed,

from sheer inability at the moment to get any farther. A solid mass of humanity (largely femininity) blocked my passage. Smedley had scores of friends and hundreds of acquaintances, his bride was hardly less well provided for, and the invitations sent out had been accepted to an extent that tested the capacity of the church — tested and found it wanting. Add to this the outsiders whom any large wedding always attracts, and it will be easily understood why I was thus brought up standing.

However, on my explaining my intimate relation with the ceremony the crowd good-naturedly made way for me — or tried to do so — and after a long, hard struggle, I succeeded in penetrating the blockade as far as the outer lobby. As planned at the rehearsal held two nights earlier, Smedley and I were to come out from a little door near the chancel and meet the bride (on the arm of a convenient uncle) at the end of her advance up the broad aisle. Word being passed that both parties were ready the organist would strike up and the bridal convoy set out. I had got near enough to catch sight — by standing on tiptoes — of the heads of the latter when, to my consternation, a great volume of sound burst suddenly upon my ears.

Tum ! tumty-tum ! tum ! tumty-tum ! tum ! tumty-tum ! tum ! tum ! tum ! tumty-tum!

The wedding march from Lohengrin ! And the bride, the uncle, the maid-of-honor, the bridesmaids and ushers were obeying the signal and starting up the aisle — with Smedley in durance miles away !

A catastrophe of the first magnitude impended; the result of trying to play *Hamlet* with " Hamlet " left out would be nothing beside it.

" Stop them ! stop them ! he isn't ready, he isn't there ! For goodness' sake tell them to come back ! " I exclaimed, but the thunder of that deceived and misguided organist drowned my voice, and if anybody heard my frantic appeal it had no effect in putting a stay on the proceedings.

The party were well on toward the chancel now and might as well continue, for to stop them midway would cause a greater sensation than to let them go on to the end. I edged forward as far as I could get and with bated breath resigned myself to await